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ABSTRACT

Eighteen fourth grade students and twenty sixth grade students participated in a study to determine if there was a significant difference in the quality of written composition among students exposed to the peer editing process as opposed to those exposed to teacher editing. The control group consisted of 8 fourth grade students and 10 sixth grade students. The experimental group consisted of 20 students, 10 from each grade. Both the control and the experimental groups were given a pretest consisting of a motivational writing assignment entitled "The Magic Wand." The students were presented a stimulus of a magic wand and brainstormed ideas about magic. From the pretest, errors were tallied in capitalization and punctuation, usage, and spelling. The average number of thought units per sentence was also calculated. Compositions were then given an overall holistic rating. The same motivating creative writing assignments were given to each group, one assignment per week, for 5 weeks. Training sessions of the peer editing process were conducted with the experimental group. Both groups were instructed in the composition process, including sentence combining, mechanics, and organization. Upon completion of the assignments, the writing of the control group was teacher edited and the writing of the experimental group was peer edited. A posttest (a replication of the pretest) was given to determine improvement in the students' writing skills. The results showed that differences were not significant but that the experimental group did show more improvement in mechanics and in the overall fluency of writing. (HOD)

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Peer Editing Versus Teacher Editing: Does It Make A Difference?

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Paper Presented at the Meeting of the
International Reading Association
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Peer Editing Versus Teacher Editing: Does It Make A Difference?

Introduction

An area of weakness being brought to the attention of educators from every sector of society is the failure of the schools to produce competent writers. There are many apparent factors that contribute to this problem. The vast majority of teachers do not feel comfortable teaching writing because they are poor writers and have had little instruction on how to teach writing. The actual time spent in the teaching of writing, time on task, and endless paperwork in correcting writing is perceived as a drudgery, and is overwhelming to teachers and students. The curriculum in the schools stress reading and literature at the expense of writing. Writing is usually limited to the English classes, because teachers of other subject areas do not realize the value of writing across the curriculum. Due to the emphasis on standardized testing and the accountability movement, instruction is focused on areas that can be measured easily with a multiple choice test, since writing cannot be objectively evaluated in this manner it is often neglected.

We can remedy many of the weaknesses of students' writing by cultivating a new image in the minds of teachers and adminstrators in the way writing should be taught.

This can and is being done through training programs such as the Bay Area Writing Project that has as its objective to teach teachers how to write and how to teach their students to write. The participants in these training programs learn that writing is a process rather than a product, that writing should occur everyday, and that it should be an ingredient basic to all areas of the curriculum.

Peer editing is a part of the writing process that the writers of this paper see as an invaluable tool in providing opportunities to write daily, providing immediate feedback, providing opportunities for interaction, reducing the teacher overload, developing a critical awareness of the materials they read, and fostering a more positive attitude toward writing. Peer editing is a process in which students edit, react, and respond to the writing of their peers.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a significant difference in the quality of written composition among students exposed to ~~the~~ peer editing as opposed to teacher editing. The following areas were examined:

1. A reduction in capitalization and punctuation errors
2. A reduction in spelling errors
3. A reduction in usage errors

4. An increase in the number of thought units per sentence
5. Improvement in overall quality of composition

Review of the Literature

Writing, often regarded as the low man on the totem pole in the area of language arts, has been neglected in lieu of reading. It was found through a study conducted Donald Graves that expenditures of public schools to develop reading skills surpassed the money spent to develop writing skills three thousand to one (cited in Haley-James, 1981). Graves found that language arts texts placed a one-sided emphasis on reading with only ten to fifteen percent devoted to writing (Graves, 1978). Reading and writing should have been given equal attention because they can compliment each other--writing skills helped to develop reading skills.

Teachers have cited many obstacles that hinder the teaching of writing skills. These obstacles included an ever-increasing amount of clerical work required from the teacher, lack of confidence within teachers to teach writing, extracurricular and academic responsibilities given to teachers, and time... time spent grading writing, and time spent conferencing with students about their writing. (Freeman, 1981)

Students learned to write by writing often. In a study done by NAEP, researchers found that students who were required

to do the most writing produced the best writing (Freeman, 1981). A question that came up was how can this be done with the obstacles that teachers have cited. The answer was "peer editing". Peer editing allowed increased writing accompanied with feedback through interaction with peers. In the peer editing process students read, reacted, responded, and made suggestions about each others' writing. The responses pointed out strengths as well as weaknesses to help improve their writing.

Teachers could not assume that students knew how to edit. They did not pick up editorial skills incidentally (Woodman, 1975). The editing process must be taught (Schwieterman, 1980). Teaching this process provided the student with knowledge and a means of taking responsibility for his own learning (Sager, 1973). In many ways this process was an extension of the writing process. Editing was a matter of taking a fresh, critical look at one's writing, relying on all intuition, knowledge, and understanding that one has of the writing process, making sure that what was written was what the writer wanted to say. (Koch & Brazil, 1978)

Mary H. Beaven felt that a climate for sharing should be established in the classroom before implementing peer editing (Beaven, 1977). If such a climate did not exist, discontent among the students could hamper this learning process.

In an experiment conducted by Marion Crowhurst (1979) students involved in peer editing expressed discontent and criticized the suggestions made by their peers. Crowhurst pointed out that this discontent was reduced when students had an understanding of constructive criticism and an understanding of the role of peer editing, whereby students could benefit from the opinion of their peers. These opinions needed not to be regarded as law, but used when deemed necessary for the improvement of writing, and ignored when irrelevant. This relieved the pressure placed on the editor, as well as the writer by freeing them to risk making mistakes, allowing everyone to benefit from the experience. (Hawkins, 1976)

Motivation was a part of all learning processes. Peer editing provided motivation in the writing process, in that students enjoyed writing for each other. They eagerly awaited the comments of their peers. This eagerness was evidenced by students wanting to do more writing and extending the length of their compositions (Beaven, 1977; Crowhurst, 1979; Woodman, 1975). Having an audience provided students with a motivating purpose for writing. The purposes for writing were reality-based, so that students wrote for an audience other than their teachers. (Wolfe, Lipscombe, Sexton, & Tucker, 1978)

Immediate and positive feedback was necessary for the writing student. This has been a problem in the past, in that the majority of editing has been done by the teacher marking every flaw. This practice has been referred as the "red ink blitz" (Haley-James, 1981), "controlling the bleeding" (Wolfe et al., 1978), and "blood bath" (Duke, 1980). Marking every mistake with the "red pen" produced negative attitudes about writing and poor self images. Some teachers felt they were being helpful, when actually they were stunting writing growth and destroying students' confidence in their writing (Wolfe et al., 1978). Not only did this discourage students, it also discouraged teachers. Endless hours were spent evaluating the writing of students which brought about a decrease in the number of writing assignments (Karegianes, Pascarella, & Pflaum, 1980). Some studies have shown that this problem can be eradicated. Blending strengths and weaknesses was found to provide more optimistic results. The student, knowing the strengths of his writing, could accept the criticism and try to improve it. (Wolfe et al., 1978)

Peer editing provided an opportunity for immediate feedback and for an increased number of writing activities. Students got a grip on written language as they read what peers had written. When peers worked together to revise passages,

they diagnosed the problems, prescribed a remedy, and labored together through the editing process (Beaven, 1977). By analyzing other students' writing, students became better judges of their own writing (Hawkins, 1976). They developed a critical eye toward what they read (Osborn, 1980), improved reading comprehension (Haley-James, 1981), and utilized critical thinking skills. (Lagana, 1973)

The dynamics of group work was ennanced by peer editing. Interpersonal skills were strengthened through interaction and cooperation between group members (Beaven, 1977). Guidance was provided by the teacher. Serving as a resource person, the teacher circulated, prodded and settled disagreements. (Roth, 1980)

Peer editing methods have varied among researchers. Lorraine Osborn (1980) implemented "writing families". Writing families were small groups of children who met and evaluated each other's writing over a five day period. Children wrote on the first day, read and critiqued within the family the second day, and edited and rewrote on the third day. On the fourth day, students chose the best story from their group which was read on the fifth day. When critiquing and editing, students were provided with a dittoed outline which served as a guide. This outline included such things as opening sentence, character description, and story ending.

Editorial groups comprised of three people were used by Audrey Roth (1980). The group consisted of an author, who developed ideas and wrote them down; an editor, who helped to develop ideas and verified the appropriateness of audience to purpose; and a proofreader, who was responsible for checking the mechanics. The group in a combined effort produced one paper, each member receiving the same grade. A nine-step editorial process enabled them to reach their goal. The group first met in an editorial conference to brainstorm about the audience, purpose, idea and approach. The author wrote the paper. The group conferenced in order for the editor to evaluate purpose and organization, and the proofreader to make corrections in the mechanics of the work, checking also for clarity. The author rewrote the composition bringing it back to the group to reevaluate. A ditto of the composition was prepared and then checked by the group for accuracy. This was duplicated and distributed to the class who responded to the writing.

Marion Crowhurst (1979) experimented with peer editing through "the writing workshop". The three components of her writing cycle were the introduction of the topic which included a prewriting warm-up, the actual writing, and the writing workshop were the students peer edited. In the writing, the group sat in a circle and passed their composition around

receiving verbal and written feedback. They were aided by a guide sheet which helped them to respond more easily and positively. The initial responses were brief and sketchy. Experience and instruction improved the quality and validity of the comments. Groups were established by assigning students of mixed abilities so that the less capable student could learn from the more capable one. The students were instructed to make specific suggestions for improvement and to respond positively to some aspect of the writing. The teacher explained that these suggestions were opinions which could be accepted or rejected. A real purpose for editing such as publishing and displaying provided motivation.

In a writing class at the University of Michigan, Daniel Fader engaged students in peer editing by placing them in groups of three. The groups were determined by a range of interests and abilities. One writer along with two editors produced a paper. All members of the group usually received the same grade. The reasons for this were three-fold, in that the members became more dependent on each other, were constantly sharpening each others' writing skills, and their perceptions. (cited in Myers, 1978)

Being a participant in the Bay Area Writing Project, Mary Kay Healey, had frequent meetings of editing groups in her

junior high classroom. As students worked in groups, read and commented on their peers' writing, they were taped. These tapes were discussed pointing out good editing and group practices. Good editors became evident and were called upon frequently by those in need of assistance. (cited in Myers, 1978)

Peter Elbow (1976), a highly regarded expert in the field of writing advocated "the teacherless writing class" whose goal was improvement of students' writing by transacting business with other people. Implementing this procedure was done by getting a committment by seven or more people for a period of ten weeks, and making sure everyone wrote something every week. Each piece was read aloud twice and received pointing and summarizing responses after a moment of silence to digest what had been heard. Reactions were shared in the last five minutes of each class. Participants had to care about their writing and its improvement. A benefit of this class was that the writer attained several reading and interpretations of his writings, not just one. The members of the group became better readers than the teacher in that they saw the writing every week, heard things out loud, heard reactions concerning each person's writing, and listened fully without evaluating and giving a grade.

A five week pilot program in composition, under the direction of Lenora Woodman (1975), determined that students could provide useful information to their peers helping them to improve their writing. The students looked at the total writing inductively as they moved through a series of editorial activities. Rhetorical features were not isolated, but were taught within the context. She recommended that these skills be taught by comparing the same student essay in first and final draft, and that each editorial activity be introduced preparing the students for the particular skill they would be appraising. After the student had edited, the teacher directed discussion questions asking him to look more closely at some of the features of the essay. The questions were comparative in nature focusing on the first and final draft. Reinforcing the editorial skill previously, the student received an unedited essay having the same rhetorical problem worked previously. The success of this method provided for the teaching of rhetorical skills in rhetorical context, improved writing skills, improved editing skills, and relieved the teacher of the whole burden of evaluation.

Methodology

Population

The participants in this study were eighteen fourth grade students from Butler Avenue School in Clinton, North Carolina, and twenty sixth grade students from Sunnyside School in Fayetteville,North Carolina. The majority of the students were from lower middle class families. They were heterogenously grouped according to sex, race, and ability. In the control group there were eight from fourth and ten from sixth grade. The experimental group consisted of twenty students, ten from each grade.

Procedures

Both the control and the experimental groups were given a pretest. The pretest was a motivational writing assignment entitled "The Magic Wand". The students were presented a stimulus of a magic wand, and they brainstormed ideas about magic. From the pretest the researchers tallied the errors made in capitalization and punctuation, usage, spelling, and counted the average number of thought units per sentence. The researchers then rated the overall quality of the composition using holistic assessment. Holistic assessment involves a quick general impression reading with the intention of obtaining a global impression (Haley-James, 1981).

The raters decided upon a range of possible scores using a one to five scale, one being the lowest and five the highest. If there was disagreement over the rating, the average of the holistic scores was taken.

The same motivating creative writing assignments were given to each group over a five week duration with one assignment per week. Training sessions of the peer editing process were conducted with the experimental group. Both groups were instructed in the composition process, including sentence combining, mechanics, and organization.

Upon completion of assignments, the writing of the control group was teacher edited. This was done by marking errors along with a brief conference. The writing of the experimental group was peer edited. The students were grouped in pairs to edit each others' paper. The pairs were rotated each week. The experimental group was given a peer editor's guide to aid them in responding and reacting to the writing of their partner. (See Appendix A) This guide was developed by the researchers of this paper with the assistance of suggested editing questions from The Yellow Pages for Students and Teachers. (Raphael, 1980)

A postest was given to determine improvement in the students' writing skills. The posttest was a replication of the pretest. In analyzing the results of the pre- and posttest, the researchers considered the mean results of the California Achievement Test total language arts battery and IQ scores.

Results

Table 1 reports the mean differences in the pre- and post-evaluation of capitalization and punctuation errors for the experimental and control groups. The experimental group averaged 10.4 errors on the pre-evaluation as opposed to 3.4 errors on the post-evaluation with a difference of 7. The control group averaged 11.5 errors on the pre-evaluation as opposed to 5.0 errors on the post-evaluation with a difference of 6.5.

The mean usage errors for both groups is shown in Table 2. In the pre-evaluation the experimental group averaged 3.8 usage errors as compared to 1.7 in the post-evaluation showing a difference of 2.1. In the pre-evaluation the control group averaged 5.5 as compared to 4.0 in the post-evaluation showing a difference of 1.5.

Table 3 indicates a difference of 2.6 in the experimental and .8 in the control group in mean spelling errors.

Table 4 discloses data on the average of thought units per sentence. The experimental and control groups averaged 1.3 thought units in the pre-evaluation compared to 1.6 and 1.4, respectively in the post-evaluation. Slight differences of .3 and .1 were shown.

Holistic assessment, a subjective evaluation tool, is reported in Table 5. The experimental group had an average rating of 2.7 which rose to 3.2 in the post-evaluation. The control group had an average rating of 2.5 in the pre-evaluation and 2.9 in the post-evaluation. The respective differences being .5 and .4.

Discussion

Results of the study show an improvement in the quality of written composition among students exposed to peer editing and to teacher editing. In the areas examined the experimental group showed greater progress than the control group in the mechanics and in the overall fluency of writing. The data explained in Tables 1-5 do not seem to yield a significant difference between the experimental and control groups. Due to small size of the population and the limited amount of time devoted to the study, the differences were not as great as anticipated.

We attribute the improvements in the writing of both groups to several factors. Instruction in writing using the steps approach provided opportunities to write daily. This involved brainstorming, prewriting, writing, editing, and rewriting. Instruction in the mechanics of writing was interspersed throughout the duration of the study. Sentence combining activities were also provided for students in regard to their ability and maturity level. The writing assignments were highly motivational in that they were topics that greatly interested these students. The peer editing group was more motivated and enthusiastic about writing because of the opportunity to peer edit. The members of the teacher edited group verbalized a desire to peer edit. Writing for an audience provided motivation and helped students to see the value of editing. As a result of this, students developed self-confidence and took their writing and the writing of others more seriously. Standardized test data can be linked to the improvement of writing. The mean IQ of the experimental group was 111 and 102 for the control group. The mean total language arts battery of the California Achievement Test was 7.9 for the experimental group and 5.8 for the control group. This data indicated that both groups were average or above in language development with the control group having a slight disadvantage in comparison to the experimental group.

There were other favorable outcomes observed by the researchers. One was a positive change in attitude toward writing. Students were more eager and more excited about writing for their peers. They expressed a desire to write and edit. Having a peer editor's guide gave students direction in how to edit, which helped to make it successful. The students voluntarily increased the length of their compositions weekly. By peer editing, the experimental group became better judges of the quality of writing.

The success of the control group is linked to instruction as well as teacher-pupil conferences about the writing. The researchers feel that this one-to-one communication yielded positive results.

In the replication of this study, the researchers would suggest an increase in the duration of the study and a larger population. These factors limited this study. As researchers in the area of writing we have positive feelings about peer editing and the results it produces. Even though the differences were not significant, we feel that this is due to the limitations of the study previously mentioned.

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Appendix A: Peer Evaluator's Guide

Peer Evaluator_____

Writer_____

1. Title of story:_____

2. Does the opening sentence in the story make you want to read it?_____ How could it have been written differently?

3. Did the writer make the main idea clear to you?_____ What do you think is the main idea of the story?

4. What part of the story did you enjoy most? Why?

5. What parts of the story need to be written differently? Why?

6. What are the strengths of the story?

7. What are the weaknesses of the story?

8. Circle the beginning word in each sentence. Does the writer begin each sentence the same way?_____ Suggest different opening words.

9. Are there any misspelled words in this story?_____ Underline all misspelled words.

10. Does the writer follow correct punctuation and capitalization rules?_____ Place a check where you find a mistake in capitalization or punctuation.

11. Are any of the sentences too short and choppy?_____ Could any sentences be combined to sound better?_____ Make suggestions.

12. Does the writer use good English?_____ List words you feel should be changed.

13. Is the ending good?_____ Does it really end the story? _____ How could it end differently?

14. Can you see the characters, things, and events clearly? _____ Can the writer use more adjectives or descriptive details? _____ Make suggestions.

Table 1

Mean Capitalization and Punctuation Errors

	Pre-evaluation	Post-evaluation	Difference
Experimental	10.4	3.4	7.0
Control	11.5	5.0	6.5

Table 2

Mean Usage Errors

	Pre-evaluation	Post-evaluation	Difference
Experimental	3.8	1.7	2.1
Control	5.5	4.0	1.5

Table 3

Mean Spelling Errors

	Pre-evaluation	Post-evaluation	Difference
Experimental	5.4	2.8	2.6
Control	5.0	4.2	0.8

Table 4

Mean Number of Thought Units Per Sentence

	Pre-evaluation	Post-evaluation	Difference
Experimental	1.3	1.6	.3
Control	1.3	1.4	.1

Table 5

Mean Holistic Evaluation

	Pre-evaluation	Post-evaluation	Difference
Experimental	2.7	3.2	.5
Control	2.5	2.9	.4